

OFFICE OF THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

SENATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT

EXHIBIT NO. 4

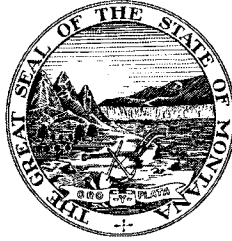
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1.14.09

BILL NO.

SB8

BRIAN SCHWEITZER
GOVERNOR



JOHN BOHLINGER
LT. GOVERNOR

SB 8 – Proponent Testimony

Capitol Room 405, Senate Local Government Committee – January 14, 2009

- I come before you today as Lt. Governor, Co-chair of the St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group, and as a proponent for SB 8. SB 8 provides all Montanans with the opportunity to create regional resource authorities and provides the citizens of the Milk River Basin to effectively address the problems regarding the rehabilitation of the St. Mary Canal and other infrastructure issues within the Milk River Basin.
- The St. Mary Canal Diversion System is vital to the 18,000 residents and economies of Glacier, Hill, Blaine, Phillips and Valley counties. Failure of this system would result in the Milk River and the economies of the river basin to literally dry up. *7 out of 10 yrs Milk River dry.*
- With the rehabilitation of the canal comes opportunity to better manage the water resources within the Milk River Basin.
- SB 8 creates a Regional Resource Authority that would provide a collaborative effort to manage the water of the Milk River system from its head waters to the Missouri River.
- SB 8 also provides for alternate funding mechanisms for the rehabilitation of the canal through the sale of bonds. This portion of funding, some \$38 million and climbing, would otherwise fall on the irrigators who are only one of the beneficiaries from the water moved through the canal system.

440,000
ACRES -
Canal ~~is~~
old. 106 yrs.

IN Glacier
NRL PK.
Authorized by
Congress
75/25?
Quadrant

- The working group has found that a Regional Resource Authority and charter form of government provides the best potential for the Milk River Basin to better manage the water of the basin, fund rehabilitation projects, and provide economic stability of the region through the collaboration of all stakeholders within the basin. The working group has researched similar approaches by all 17 western states in attempts to consolidate conservation districts, irrigation districts, municipalities and other stakeholders.
- A Regional Resource Authority has the ability to assess fees to raise revenue to ensure the delivery and management of water to *the* basin. The authority does not have the ability to assess fees on reservation lands, but may enter into government to government written agreements with approval of tribal leadership to agree upon the terms of tribal participation in the authority. (Section 2: 3.a.ii)
- *Oversite -* Furthermore, a Regional Resource Authority is at the will of the people. The constituents of each county must approve the charter by vote and elect a governing body for the charter. If the legislature finds that the charter is in conflict with Montana statute they may review the charter for modification, or revoke the charter. (Section 2-5)
- In closing, the Milk River is truly the life blood of the communities of the High Line. Granting these communities with the opportunity to create a Regional Resource Authority will ensure the region's future water supply and economic stability through a collaborative effort of all counties and stakeholders within the Milk River Basin. Thank you and I ask for your support on SB 8.